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Senator Rockefeller's Dedication to the Welfare of Children

Senator Rockefeller has long been a champion for children and families in West Virginia and around the country. Throughout his career, he has been actively involved in the development and improvement of our nation's foster care system, as well as worked to facilitate the adoption of our children.

Improving Placement, Safety, and Quality of Life for Children in Foster Care.

- He was one of the main architects of the **Adoption and Safe Families Act**, which became law in 1997. This bipartisan legislation represented historic reform in the promotion of adoption and in the support of vulnerable children and families. Among other things, this law clarified that the safety and health of the child should be the primary considerations, which was an important, and also symbolic, change. This legislation also created incentives for states who increase the number of adoptions from foster care, and decreased the window of time for decisions to be made about permanency for children in foster care. *The law led to a doubling of adoptions from foster care nationwide.*
- Senator Rockefeller authored the **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999** with Senator Chafee. This law focuses on the thousands of youth who age out of foster care each year. This legislation doubled funding to help these vulnerable youth develop independent living skills, and created vouchers they can use to further their education or seek job training.
- Senator Rockefeller introduced the **Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act**, which became law in 2006. This law was designed to help children in foster care who are placed with families in other states. Prior to enactment, it took two to three times as long to place these children compared to in-state placements.
- During negotiations on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Senator Rockefeller fought for **changes to the foster care payment**

structure to allow relatives who take permanent custody of a child to receive payments to help them offset the cost of caring for them.

- In legislation reported out of the Senate Finance Committee in December 2013, Rockefeller secured three important priorities to create the first dedicated federal funding stream for post-adoption and post-permanency services so adoptions can be successful, eliminate permanent foster care as an option for children under age 16, and help maintain sibling relationships.

Preventing Harmful Cuts to Foster Care and Adoption Programs. Senator Rockefeller has been a consistent advocate for strong federal funding in foster care and adoption programs.

- In 1996, Congress passed **welfare reform**, which effectively replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). In replacing AFDC, Congress created a block grant for the welfare program, now known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Senator Rockefeller led the fight to prevent federal programs that help vulnerable children in foster care from being block granted as well, which would have severely limited funding for these important priorities.
- He has repeatedly voted against legislation that would drastically cut programs that help abused or neglected children and gut programs that help low-income working families with kids. This includes eliminating the Social Services Block Grant, which helps over 11 million kids through funding to states for services such as child abuse prevention and intervention, foster care, and child protective services.

Protecting Children Affected by Substance Abuse. It is estimated that 9 percent of children in the U.S (6 million) live with at least one parent who abuses alcohol or other drugs. Studies indicate that between one-third and two-thirds of child maltreatment cases involve substance use to some degree. For this reason, Senator Rockefeller has worked to address issues related to substance abuse in the child welfare system.

- He succeeded in including a provision in **the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006** to improve outcomes for **children affected by methamphetamine**. This provision creates a new grant program to forge partnerships for families in the child welfare system affected by methamphetamine.
- Also as part of that legislation, he negotiated the continuance of the **Mentoring Children of Prisoners** program and added a new pilot program to help increase these services to rural areas.

- Rockefeller introduced legislation, the **Keeping Families Safe Act**, to allow children who are currently in foster care to transfer from foster care to the residential drug treatment program to be cared for and receive counseling along with their parent. The foster care maintenance payment is then transferred to the residential care program to help offset the costs of caring for the children.

Strengthening the Judicial System's Ability to Handle Child Welfare Cases.

- Rockefeller has spent considerable effort trying to improve how our courts handle child welfare cases – ranging from making sure they have adequate funding and up-to-date systems to track caseloads, to making sure that cases are processed within a reasonable time frame so children can move into permanent arrangements and making sure that personnel have access to the training they need.
- In 1993, Rockefeller helped create the Court Improvement Program as part of the Family Preservation and Support Services Program Act.
- Senator Rockefeller was a lead sponsor of the **Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000**. The law improved state courts and expanded the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) to ensure that every child has a person who is solely in watching out for the child's best interest.
- He authored the **Working to Enhance Courts for At-Risk and Endangered Kids Act of 2005 (WE CARE Kids)**, a law that helps courts improve the data and information system for children and train judges and court personnel serving abused and neglected children.

Collecting Data Necessary for Effective Children's Programs.

- Senator Rockefeller introduced the **State Child Well-Being Research Act**, which would invest in the state-by-state collection of data on child well-being so Members, state policymakers, and advocates can track the effect of policy changes on children, especially low-income children. States have broad flexibility on welfare policy, Medicaid and even CHIP, so it is important to track how various policies effect children's well-being.